

*Bethel United Methodist Church
Advent Devotional*

2021



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Rev. Faith Weedling, Pastor

Coming Home for Christmas!

The theme for this year's Advent Worship and our Advent Devotional is "Coming Home for Christmas." We will be using the lectionary texts as we look at the work of Advent each week – waiting and preparing.

Since March 2020, we've spent much more time at home than we might have imagined prior to this pandemic. So why an Advent Season focusing on "Coming Home for Christmas"?

For people outside of the church, the pre-Christmas season is a time to prepare for the grand celebration – decorate the tree, bake the cookies, wrap the gifts, and hang the garland – the holiday is coming! But for Christians, Christmas is more than holiday celebrations with friends and family. It is first and foremost about the Mass of Christ, the celebration of God Incarnate – Jesus who has come into our world to remind us that we are not alone – God is with us. And as we celebrate that Christ has come into the world, we anticipate his coming again to usher in the fullness of the Kingdom of God, where we will study war no more, where people will walk in the light, where joy will be found, and where love will be the tie that binds us together. This is the home we seek and long for, so "Come Home for Christmas" – home where the light of Christ brightens our world, home where hope, peace, joy and love reign, home where we find Christ abiding with and in us – to our truest home.

Our Advent Devotional contains stories of waiting, preparation, and drawing near to our true home. There are stories of discovering hope, peace, joy, or love in the midst of life with all of its blessings and trials. Bethel folks have shared from the heart in this booklet. May these devotions inspire you to find hope and joy each day of the Advent and Christmas season.

Fun for Kids of All Ages



SPREAD LOVE AND HOPE THIS SEASON

- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 COLLECT 5 CLOTHING ITEMS TO DONATE | 2 Make a card FOR your NEIGHBOR | 3 CALL someone JUST TO SAY 'I LOVE YOU' | 4 READ a CHRISTMAS BOOK TOGETHER | 5 Leave a TREAT FOR your MAIL CARRIER |
| 6 SING a CHRISTMAS SONG | 7 Decorate a GINGERBREAD House | 8 FIND a CHORE TO DO FOR someone ELSE | 9 FIND 3 TOYS TO DONATE OR GIVE AWAY | 10 WRITE a NOTE TO your TEACHER |
| 11 MAIL a LETTER TO someone YOU DON'T see OFTEN | 12 DONATE 10 nonPERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS | 13 GO LOOK AT CHRISTMAS LIGHTS | 14 Take a FLOWER TO someone SPECIAL | 15 Make UP a FUN CHRISTMAS SONG |
| 16 PLAY a BOARD Game TOGETHER | 17 Make a GIFT FOR someone ELSE TO enjoy | 18 INVENT AND COOK a new meal | 19 Make a STRANGER SMILE TODAY | 20 FIND 2 BOOKS TO GIVE TO a FRIEND |
| 21 DRINK HOT CHOCOLATE AND WATCH a movie | 22 Make a new ORNAMENT FOR your TREE | 23 Share a SPECIAL HOLIDAY memory | 24 Have a COOKIE DECORATING CONTEST | 25 MERRY CHRISTMAS |



Twelve Days of Christmas

1 12/25	Christmas Day! Read the Christmas Story: Luke 2: 1-20	7 12/31	Have a New Year's Eve Dance Party.
2 12/26	Watch a Christmas movie.	8 1/1	Happy New Year! Make resolutions.
3 12/27	Read your favorite Christmas book.	9 1/2	Take a walk in nature.
4 12/28	Write thank you notes for your gifts.	10 1/3	Bake cookies and take to neighbors.
5 12/29	Learn how other countries celebrate the holidays.	11 1/4	Do a good deed and pay it forward.
6 12/30	Make a craft and share with a friend.	12 1/5	Have a game night in your pajamas.

November 28

Hope: Time to Go Home

How can we thank God enough for you, given all the joy we have because of you before our God? Night and day, we pray more than ever to see all of you in person and to complete whatever you still need for your faith. Now may our God and Father himself guide us on our way back to you. May the Lord cause you to increase and enrich your love for each other and for everyone in the same way as we also love you. May the love cause your hearts to be strengthened, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his people. Amen. 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

During my senior year of high school, my uncle (just four years older than me) and his new bride and infant son came home for Thanksgiving. Joe and Janette were in the Army at the time and stationed in Texas. It was great to have them with us for their leave.

I was about twelve years old when Joe and his brother, Dan (seven months older than me), came to live with us. Since then, I had adjusted from being the oldest to being the oldest girl. It was a change, but change happens in families. But that Thanksgiving, I also had the joy of an older sister. We all went apple picking – and boy did we pick apples! Janette was determined to bake enough apple pie to feed our family of twelve gathered at the table for a couple of days. (Baby Cameron slept during most meals.)

She taught me how to make pie crust and make great pies. Lots of us sat around the table peeling apples for what seemed like hours, but we shared stories and laughter and had a great time together.

Just three years later, on November 1, I joined the Navy. I was then one of the children away from home. Each year, after that first year in Boot Camp until Steve and I got married and divided holidays between two families, my hope for a joyous reunion with my family grew as we got closer to the holiday season. Even when relationships were strained or life situations were difficult, there was hope and excitement when it was time to go home. And that hope was held all the more by my parents as we returned home.

God is always waiting for us to come home, whether we moved far away or just ran out to the store. We come home to God in prayer, Scripture reading, singing of hymns and praise songs. But the home where God calls us together to complete whatever we still need for our faith, to increase and enrich our love for each other and for everyone is the church.



First Sunday *of* Advent

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During the up and down numbers of Covid cases in our area and the need for some to be extra cautious about being out in public or other health concerns that keep us all from coming together, I invite you to keep coming home – in person at either service or through our online service. Let us keep gathering together at this home God has blessed us with, Bethel United Methodist Church, hoping for the day when we can gather all together again, and praying for and giving thanks for one another.

Holy and Gracious God, thank you for our home in you, for Bethel Church – the house where we grow in faith together, and for all who faithfully participate, in whatever ways they are able, to the love and service we offer one another. May our hope continue to grow for the day we can all gather together with you and each other. Amen.

Pastor Faith Weedling

November 29

Hope: Time to Go Home

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.... You know the way to the place where I am going.

John 14:1-4

I almost didn't write a devotion this year. I wasn't feeling particularly "devoted." And then, back in September and early October when the topics for the devotions were announced, I thought that, if I relented and did write one, it was going to be on the topic, "Fear of Home," not "Time to Go Home." "Fear," because as the holiday season was in my thoughts since late summer, I was not exactly looking forward to it. I was dreading it. Again. I felt that God wasn't hearing my prayers at all, much less answering them. And my old fear of God -- born of how I had been raised in the strict Greek Orthodox Church -- was returning. I was feeling that God was angry with me and was punishing me. That's not a great feeling.

I know we probably all feel a little like that at times. I guess it's human nature or is that just an excuse for permission to feel sorry for oneself? Nothing was going right. Even though I was dutifully coming to church every week and helping out and attending Bible Study, and even though I deep down **knew** that God was right there beside me, I felt lost. More than that, I felt I had lost my compass, because God **is** our compass. He leads the way home to Him. Only, I couldn't find him anymore, and I didn't know where to look. And the holidays were looming just a couple of months away. The calendar was taunting me. Christmas was coming, and I just felt like running away from home and all the upcoming joy and festivities. Phooey.

And then, a friend who knew my heart was concerned about me, and invited me to meet her at a lovely getaway to de-stress for a few days, and that getaway, in turn, had been a thoughtful gift to her from a couple of her friends. Was this God showing me he was at work? Hmmm. But it couldn't be, could it, because a truck totaled my SUV just as I arrived at my destination. More stress and aggravation which I most certainly did not need. Where were you then, God? But thankfully, I was completely uninjured. How was that even possible? Hmmm.

Still full of doubt, the next couple of weeks flew by and before I knew it, the other driver's insurance company had given me an amazing settlement and I was driving a brand new SUV. I barely remember doing the paperwork for any of it, and I began to think God had shouldered the burden for me. Hmmm.

Then, the day after I picked up my shiny new vehicle, another friend texted me a post from an animal rescue website about a particularly affectionate cat who needed to be rehomed immediately. She had been sending me similar texts regularly, and I had asked this notorious cat lady to just stop it, because I told her I was done with having pets because they just die and break our hearts. But she persisted. And without even thinking, I responded to the post, and ultimately brought home Meeko, the sweetest, funniest, most affectionate and playful cat I had had in a long, long time! My friend later confided that it was God who had nudged her to try just one more time, and send me that post. HmMMM again.



In the course of exactly three weeks – from the date of the accident on Tuesday, October 5, through my unplanned beautiful new SUV, to October 26, the day I adopted Meeko, my outlook has changed completely. In the months before this period, I would stare at Rosanne’s stunning quilt hanging in the social hall – the one that reads, “Be Still and Know That I Am God “ and its various abbreviated phrases within – and I would know that, even though I read it as a call to be patient and to trust God, I was more focused on immediate gratification in prayer than on the faith and beauty and inner peace and inherent trust required of prayer. I couldn’t just “Be Still.” I had lost sight of The Way Home, and it made me feel angry and depressed and, well, lost.

The message on Rosanne’s quilt banner, from Psalm 46:10, is a message for me and for all of us. That psalm begins with the words, “God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” That’s what I want my concept of “home” to be: a place of refuge, where I’m safe and protected and well taken care of. We have that with God, and only with God. It takes time to nurture that relationship and to be patient, and it starts with us. God is already at home in our hearts. He’s been there all along, even if we deny it. We can find him there, but only if we take the time to look. And it does take time. Time..... To Go Home.

Heavenly and Precious Father, you are the only Home we will ever truly need. And if we have trouble knowing it’s time to go home, or are too impatient or too distracted to seek it on our own, please take us by the hand and show us the way. Amen.

Cathy Carayas

November 30

Hope: Time to Go Home

My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. John 14:2-3

In my first 18 years, I lived in six different places in two different towns in Indiana. In the next 28 years, I lived in 17 more places in eight more states. And in the last 17 years, I've lived in four more places here in Virginia. 63 years - 27 places - nine states. For many years I was envious of people who could say they'd grown up in the same house, or that they'd lived in the same town, or even the same county, for their whole lives because I always felt like I'd missed something by moving around so much. When I'd hear people talk about their roots, I worried about not having any roots of my own. Having no roots left me feeling like I had no place – no *home*.

Things began changing for me when I met Faith. After we married and had children, I began to understand that home isn't a place – it's a relationship. Wherever Faith and the kids were was exactly where I wanted to be – because that's where home is - because that's where our love lives. Even when we were separated by thousands of miles for days, weeks, or months on end, our love endured.

Things continued changing for me when I found faith. While some can claim finding faith in an instant, it has been a much longer and sometimes arduous, perhaps even contentious, journey for me. Fortunately for me, I've been blessed by sharing my journey with the journeys of many other saints and sinners along the way. As we shared our stories and laughed and cried with one another, it became clear to me that not every place is a home, and there is no home without love. It is true that not everyone has a home in this world; but it is equally true that God is preparing a home for all of us in the coming kingdom of God. To live in love we must come home, and God loves us so much that God is calling us home even now!

Almighty and everlasting God – thank you for your Son Jesus Christ whom you sent into the world to redeem your creation. Thank you for the things he taught us and for the ways he demonstrated for us how to live in your righteousness. Thank you for the indwelling presence of your Holy Spirit who gifts us and empowers us for the tasks you call us to here and now. Thank you for the promise of a home with you here and in your coming kingdom in which we may live eternally in the depth of your love and grace. As we wait for that day, give us the courage and the commitment to love others as much as you love us so that we might work to make this world a home and not just a place. These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Steve Weedling

December 1

Hope: Time to Go Home

Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.
Luke 21: 32-33

I will never forget my first Christmas away from home. It was December 25, 1966, fifty-five years ago. I was a new Air Force recruit just assigned to my first base at Homestead Air Force Base in Homestead, Florida.



Being away from home and not really knowing anyone that well, I felt really alone. It made me realize how much the Christmas season meant to me. Instead of getting up early Christmas morning to get presents and great food, I was awake at 5 a.m. that morning to go running. There were no presents or home cooked food. After running we had breakfast in the mess hall and it was a very subdued place indeed because we were all pretty much in the same boat, away from home for the first time.

I received a care package from my mom with a present and some baked goods. It was great and I really enjoyed it, but it wasn't home. That was the saddest Christmas of my life! That Christmas taught me a valuable lesson. Christmas is not about gifts and candy and home cooking. It's about family and friends, going to midnight service on Christmas Eve, and thanking God for all our many blessings and especially His greatest gift of all, His son, Jesus Christ, our savior.

That Christmas fifty-five years ago made me realize that the true meaning of Christmas is not about the fancy cars we have, the homes we have, or any material possessions. They will all fade away over time. What is real is God and He will never fade away. He will always be there for us.

Going home for Christmas the following year was one of the happiest Christmases of my life. Being home with family and friends was truly a blessing, which I thoroughly enjoyed. More importantly, I felt an inner peace in knowing the true reason for the season.

Dear Lord, we are grateful for your son, Jesus. Please be with those military families that will be separated this Christmas. Continually remind us that Christmas is not about material possessions, but about the gift of your son Jesus Christ and His love for us. Amen.

Tom Ferrell

December 2

Hope: Time to Go Home

*Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.
Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, Lord, are good. Psalm 25: 4-7*

While growing up in northern New York, my sisters and I would each receive an Advent calendar from our grandmother who lived in Montreal. As I always loved having the calendar and counting down the days, I continued the tradition as I grew into adulthood. One special memory always pops into my head every year at this time and lets me know I was being watched over during the Advent season.

It was the first week of December and I was moving from my apartment into a townhouse with some coworkers. Given the craziness of moving, I asked a friend, Steve, to keep my dog, Buddy, for a couple of days to make life easier, but that turned out to not be the case. Shortly into moving day, Steve called in a panic to let me know he'd somehow managed to lose Buddy somewhere along I-81 near Front Royal. How he managed to do that is a whole other story, but regardless, the outcome was the same – my Buddy was missing!

Given the date this happened (some 40 years ago!), the internet and social media weren't available to assist in my search. I placed ads in local newspapers and made signs with photos of Buddy that I distributed to gas stations and little stores near Front Royal along the I-81 corridor; then I hoped and prayed and waited for someone to call. A week went by with no word of Buddy, and my hope of finding him was waning. It was a Saturday morning when I received a call from a farmer in White Post, Virginia (on Rt 340 not far from Winchester) who was pretty sure Buddy had been hanging around his barn. Elated to have a lead, I jumped in the car and headed to White Post. As I

pulled into the driveway, Buddy and I spied one another and he literally jumped through the open passenger window and into the car (the only act of agility he ever performed!). I still get teary remembering that wonderful reunion.

When Buddy and I returned home that day, I remember that I had yet to open the window on my Advent calendar as I'd not taken the time to do so that morning. When I lifted the flap, the picture was that of a little black and white dog; an answer to my prayer.

Dear Lord, thank you for listening and hearing my prayers even though I seem to turn to you more frequently in times of trouble. Your loving and compassionate response is always appreciated. Amen.

Kirsten King



December 3

Hope: Time to Go Home

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 5:19-20

It was 2006 when we made the decision to sell our home in Fairfax and move to Warrenton, full of hope. It was a huge move, as we'd lived in Fairfax for 35 years and had raised our three children there. Several months after our move, we met Doloris Baker in the parking lot of Bethel UMC. Well, you know the rest of the story if you know Doloris! She was God's special greeter stationed at Bethel! Our first Sunday visiting, another lady came up to welcome us...and here it was Pat Martin, whom I'd worked with years ago when she was the director of Music at Bruen Chapel UMC and I was the Director of Music at Oakton UMC, both located in Fairfax. We had joined our two children's choirs together to present the musical PSALTY, at both churches. One of the songs in PSALTY is "In His Time" and it remains one of my favorites today. Listening to the children sing this was so special.

*In his time, in his time;
He makes all things beautiful in his time.
Lord, please show me every day, as you're teaching me your way,
That you do just what you say in your time.*

*In your time, in your time;
You make all things beautiful in your time.
Lord, my life to you I bring; may each song I have to sing,
Be to you a lovely thing, in your time.*

Ironically, one of the first Sundays we visited Bethel, we met a couple who were visiting also. Their names...Joice and David Fredenburgh. Very soon we were all singing in the choir and preparing a Christmas Cantata to be shared with our church under the direction of our beloved Gretchen Davis. Oh, the memories of years ago, and how much we loved Christmas music that helps to prepare for celebrating the birthday of Jesus. Music can be sung, played, read as a prayer, listened to, and shared as a group. Let us seek the Lord for His perfect peace and keep our hope alive as we prepare for the coming of Jesus this holiday season.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of music and how it can inspire our devotion to God. Thank you for the many Christmas memories we have had through the years. Please help us all to slow down and enjoy this special holiday season. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Jane Brewer

December 4

Hope: Time to Go Home

But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14-15

Every year our church folks are asked to write a devotional during Christmas time. This is not an easy task for me. I didn't grow up looking forward with any anticipation of gifts and holiday cheer. This holiday was always tense with whom we as a family were going to spend dinner with. If it were up to us kids we'd all say, "Let's go to Mom's folks." The other grandparents rarely engaged us with chatter or even hugs. Ever!

We'd attend Sunday School and as young as three or four years old I accepted Christ into my life and God as my loving Father. Even now I try to make sense of how my dad's folks were so standoffish. Perhaps because my mother did not raise us Catholic and my dad's parents spoke very little English when we visited.

Where was there a sense of Christmas joy and hope? It was found buried in my heart. I thank God for my Sunday School teachers and folks from church that would greet me with a hello and smile.

Today even Bethel UMC reminds me so much to share God's love— even to the little ones.

Dear Heavenly Father, Creator of all things, you are my only hope. I lift up my prayers to you and never question why. I wait with earthly hope to accept your ways. Amen.

Dona Nagy-Sutton



December 5

Peace: The Fear of Home

For with God, nothing shall be impossible.

Luke 1:37

While growing up in Morgantown, West Virginia, our family struggled a lot during the Christmas holidays. Our dear mother worked daily as a waitress and laborer in a factory to raise and support me, two sisters, and my brother. I was ten years old when my father deserted the family and fled to another state.

After my father left, my mother felt it was very important to keep good Christian values within the family and for us to attend church on a regular basis. Although she didn't attend church, she saw to it that we all attended church, were baptized, and attended a regular youth group. I think the name of the group was called Chi Rho. It involved youth fellowship, games, prayer, and Bible study.

I recall us being assisted financially through social services whereby we received free lunches at school and partial free medical care. One year in particular, through a West Virginia University Women's Sorority Group, I attended a large Christmas dinner party and was given a new pair of shoes at the party. Unbeknownst to me, my mother was given money from WVU students to purchase the shoes as they were supposed to be from Santa Claus.

My dear mother could very easily have put us four children in foster care but because of her love for us she struggled and provided a secure home for us. We finished high school and afterwards I joined the Marine Corps at 17 years of age and felt it was one less mouth she would have to feed. While in the Marines I sent her a small check every month to assist her with her finances. Sadly, my dear mother passed away at 49 years of age and I feel that her hard work, dedicated love, and sacrifices for her family took a toll on her short life.

As I think back on my childhood I feel the love and sacrifices from our mother helped mold me into who I am today. I love my God, my dear wife who sadly is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, our children and grandchildren, my country, and our church.

Dear God, we all may go through difficult times but pray that you will give us the will to have strong faith, love others, live a clean life, and pray regularly. We all will get through difficulties in life and strive to please you, Heavenly Father. Amen.

Ken Adams



2ND SUNDAY OF *Advent*

Peace

December 6

Peace: The Fear of Home

And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

Every time I think of you, I thank my God. And whenever I mention you in my prayers, it makes me happy. This is because you have taken part with me in spreading the good news from the first day you heard about it. God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns. You have a special place in my heart. So it is only natural for me to feel the way I do. All of you have helped in the work that God has given me, as I defend the good news and tell about it here in jail. God himself knows how much I want to see you. He knows that I care for you in the same way that Christ Jesus does. I pray that your love will keep on growing and that you will fully know and understand how to make the right choices. Then you will still be pure and innocent when Christ returns. And until that day, Jesus Christ will keep you busy doing good deeds that bring glory and praise to God.

Philippians 1:3-11

“From the west coast of a peninsula, just off the Yellow Sea, in a place that is sometimes typhoon drenched, other times bone-chilling and windswept, is a part of the world known as Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea. Hello to all, from your fellow Christian brother.” ...words I wrote home in an open letter to family and friends many years ago during my second assignment to the Land of the Morning Calm.

I've done my share of traveling during my 60+ years on this earth, twenty of those years as an Air Force officer's brat and 27 years as an Airman myself. And although Korea was around the other side of the world from Virginia where my loved ones lived, I was not as lonely as I may have been because of the welcoming of both my fellow Airmen and very much so, our host-nation friends. A very memorable time was during the Christmas of 2000, when base leadership pitched in to buy turkeys, hams, and most of the main meal. We Senior NCOs took care of most everything else and gathered early at the Chapel Annex, named the “SonLight Inn,” with its fully equipped kitchen to prepare the big meal. We served much of our Airmen population that day and for those who could not make it, we took heaping plates out to them. But this was to be a Christmas of true sharing with others, beyond our fellow U.S. Airmen to include the South Korean, or Republic of Korea “ROK” Airmen, also known as “ROKAF,” stationed there at Kunsan. Many of them also were away from family, away from home just like we found ourselves. We packed up boxes and boxes of food and drinks, along with printouts of Christmas carols, and a couple of guitars, and headed to the ROKAF barracks, with Santa riding in the front seat of the bus. It was an overwhelmingly heartwarming experience for me that day to see a few dozen fellow

Korean Airmen in uniform come down to meet us in the front hall, partake of the meal and sweet desserts, as well as sing carols in all of our various accents: Southern, West Coast, East Coast, the same from the regions of the peninsula of South Korea. We had a blast! I was “home” for a few hours, enjoying great company and enjoying talking to friends I’d worked hard with for nearly a year, while meeting many new friends. It was fellowship at its most spiritual, refreshing, and international best!

Even though I was away from my familial home for another Christmas I indeed had found a home of family and friends in the ROK. And from the familiar “Annyeong haseyo” to the even more familiar and friendly “Yeoboseyo”, that came from my new friends, I knew I’d been home that year after all.

A couple of weeks later, on my last full day on Kunsan, I headed back to the SonLight Inn and reminisced, as I do still today about that Christmas. The entire assignment of the year of 2000 I knew I had been blessed by God through all those caring and wonderful people I was able to meet and to share our true home away from home.

Dear Father, we are blessed in so many ways in this world and one of those ways is in knowing we are at home wherever we may be at that moment. You help us overcome our fears of being with people who may seem different from us, in a land foreign to us, but knowing You are always with us wherever we may be, we can feel the hospitality and be part of it in return. Let us know anywhere we may be during Christmas we have first been blessed by the birth of your Son; blessed by the presence of the Spirit; and humbled to know wherever we share a meal we are of one family sharing the bounty upon the table of Christian fellowship. Amen.

Don Otey





December 7

Peace: the Fear of Home

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:6

In mid-June, I made the hard decision to sell my home: the one I shared with Marty here at Lake of the Woods. We loved the house and loved living here. But after he died, especially over the last couple of years it had become too big, too empty, too much to care for. I spent much of the Covid year getting all my administrative and financial affairs modified and in order so when my time comes, my children will have an easy time... at least with the details part. So, as a final detail to make things easier for me now and for them in later years (I hope), I decided to sell my house and buy one in Haymarket, where I will be closer to my children, grandchildren, and dear friends.

The daunting task of dismantling a house with a full storage room, workshop and years of accumulated stuff, loomed. No matter how many times Marty preached about “stuff,” we had plenty of it. I vowed not to take anything to my new house that I personally would not enjoy having or using. There would be no unopened boxes or crates hiding anywhere for years for me. The first thing I did was pray that God would give me the energy each day to do what I needed to do; would help me find homes for the “stuff”; would take care of the entire process; and would carry it on to completion.

And so the clean out began. If I hadn't used it, worn it, looked at it with love in the last year or so, it was purged. All of Marty's sermons, clergy books, study books, clergy stoles, and communion ware are now in the homes and churches of other clergy persons. Most of our nativity collection will now be enjoyed in other homes and churches. Household goods, tools, and clothing have found new homes with many people who need them. Some long-ago stored away Christmas decorations have found new homes... perhaps in yours. And some things, like 34 bags of shredded documents have found a new home... committed to the earth. My daughter Carroll and her husband Mike cleared everything from the storage room, taking most of it to their new home that has a basement. Duane and Rosanne Williamson cleared out Marty's workshop for Duane's new workshop. I sent single pieces of family china to nieces in Texas and Pennsylvania who are grateful to give them a home. Everything now has a new home, except me.

My new house won't be ready until mid-March, so I am now house sitting for Jim and Sheila Templeton while they enjoy the warmer Florida weather until the end of February. So ... is this home?

For me, regardless of my surroundings, my home is where my soul is. Whether it's living in someone else's house, or visiting friends or relatives... where I am, my home is there. Where is your home? It may not be what or where you thought it would be.

O God, you are our true home: not a brick house, or a tent or a tree house, or even a stable. Help us stay connected to you and to others by keeping you in our hearts. Amen.

Pat Martin

December 8

Peace: the Fear of Home

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

And I will remember my covenant, which [is] between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. Genesis 9:15

When my husband, Bob, announced he wanted to visit a local kennel to get a new Labrador (12 years ago), I decided I wanted the Yorkie I always dreamed of having. I jumped onto the Internet to locate a kennel that bred Yorkies, but no females could be found in the immediate area. During my inquiry I encountered a website, created by a network of breeders all over the United States, for puppy adoption. The program provided pictures for browsing through with the hope of finding a visually appealing dog. Since cuteness isn't a dependable gauge of temperament, this was risky. What if I ended up with one of those Yorkie arm sharks? I was praying feverishly about whether I could handle the responsibility for 12-18 years of ownership. I tend to want things or start hobbies and then grow bored. I was worried I wouldn't be a loving enough Mommy for my baby and patient enough to handle all the trials that come with it. As I was scrolling through the puppies a pretty little face appeared and I fell instantly in love. Her name was Aimee. This name has meanings attributed to love but the critical one was "Beloved of God.". My heart knew she was chosen just for me by God.

Her mother was four pounds and her father was three pounds, so I assumed I would have a teacup Yorkie. Aimee stopped growing at about 12 pounds; proving advantageous during intense doggie excitement with her sister Katie. Aimee needed to be sturdy enough to handle the occasional collision when Katie grew to a clumsy 86 pounds. Additionally, we have both hawks and occasionally eagles. But let's not go there.

Now little dogs are fun to dress up, but in my defense, Aimee has only worn bows in her hair a few times, neck scarves from the groomer, and two of her seven sweaters. The sweaters turned out to be a bad investment when Katie, the Labrador, started using them as handles for controlling her sister. Generally Aimee is in charge, so this proved quite entertaining. Once I watched, puzzled, as Katie turned Aimee over and proceeded to nibble her in various places while she squirmed ecstatically. Astounded I realized she was being tickled.



Aimee and Katie were both a joy to own. But if you wanted to see real doggie joy, then all you needed to do was say the word “Bubbles” to Aimee. She would start dancing and yipping in excitement. I would blow the bubbles and she would jump around ecstatically to pop them.

To our sadness, this bundle of joy passed away in October. It was heartbreaking. In our sadness Karla Yocum referred me to a book called *Cold Noses at the Pearly Gates*. This book gave me hope, then conviction, that our beloved pets will be with us in heaven, then finally, after the resurrection, with us in the new heaven and new earth. This book speaks to the innocence of animals who don’t need a redeemer to save them. They are loved by God because he created them and where there is love there is joy and hope. Now if heaven just has Bubbles, I’ll be all set.

Abba Father, your promises are true and your love for all creation, especially imperfect humans, gives us joy and hope. Thank you for taking care of our furry friends who loved us on earth as you love us, unconditionally. There is a reason why dog is God spelled backwards. It’s the closest to unconditional love we will ever feel on this earth. I hope that when Aimee met you in Heaven she danced for joy in your presence as she always did when we left and returned to the house, even if we had only been gone for a few minutes. Amen.

Debbie Mroczek

December 9

Peace: The Fear of Home

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Luke 2:13-14

The above verses in the Gospel have always been one of my favorites for this season in the church calendar. I picture it in my mind as a great Hallelujah Chorus honoring God for what he has done. Verses 8-12 previously tells how the angel appeared to some shepherds out in the nearby fields and explained to them what had just happened; how God had just created a new and ultimate covenant for salvation for **all** who would be his chosen ones. And who were the first of his chosen ones to receive the news? The humble and meek shepherds. God's favor rests on all people, but especially the lowly, humble, and meek.

And the heavenly host bestowed **peace** to those on whom God's favor rests. I sure hope and pray that his favor rests on me. I know it does, even though I have been burdened with some tragic times in my life, losing two daughters and now my wife's health issues. But I also know that he has been holding my hand through all my burdens and is still holding my hand to this day. I am looking forward to the **peace** of this Advent season with the special church events and worship services sans my two daughters, but with my beloved wife of 54 years, and my four grandchildren, two here and two in New York.

In these times of turmoil and conflict and evil that is abounding in our country and around the world, the best place for me to find **peace** is here at home and with my church family here at Bethel United Methodist Church. I truly hope to see all who read this in our church during the Advent Season events and services. Come join me and share in the **peace** you will find there. **Peace** be with you always.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for providing the ultimate covenant through your Son, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, the Redeemer, King of Kings, and the Prince of Peace. Only through him can we come to you, by faith in him and who he was and is, the Holy Spirit. Help us to remain faithful to him and follow where he leads us. Amen.

Murray Edwards



*Glory to God in the Highest;
Peace on Earth and Good Will to All*

December 10

Peace: The Fear of Home

Because my earliest belief about God was the embodiment of love, I was perplexed by scripture that spoke of fearing God. As a child I also heard that God was to be feared because God kept a tally on each of us. Every time we sinned, it was recorded. There is no hiding from God, so the possibility of imminent punishment was a frightening thought. Still, it seemed inexplicable that God, who loved us, would be intent on punishment.

When an idea bothers us, it helps us dig deeper. Over time I put together the compassionate God and the judging God. Fear, in terms of awe or reverence, is appropriate. As a child, I understood that if I did something wrong, my parents who loved me, would correct me. I also didn't want to hurt my parents. So it should be in our spiritual life. Our sins hurt the heart of God. Out of love, God wants us to change harmful ways. That requires judgment. The worst thing God can do for our benefit and the benefit of others is to pat us on the head when we sin and say, "never mind."

The Old Testament prophet, Malachi, has news. God is sending a messenger to get people ready. It will happen suddenly, but we know to expect it.

*Well, pay attention! I am sending my Messenger to prepare the way for me;
The One you seek will suddenly come to the Temple,
The Messenger of the Covenant whom you long for will come,
Says God Omnipotent.*

Malachi 3:1

But Malachi is not saying we should get comfortable. The second verse asks, Who will be able to live through God's day of judgment?

But who can endure the day of that Coming? Who can stand firm when that One appears? That day will be like a smelter's fire, a launderer's soap. God will preside as refiner and purifier, purifying the Children of Levi, refining them like gold and silver—then they will once again make offerings to God in righteousness.

Malachi 3:2-3

We are forewarned. Scripture lays out what is expected and consequences of turning away, of mockingly asking God, "What have you done for me today?" According to Malachi, this is what God tells the people:



PRE PARE THE WAY

You've said, "It is useless to serve God. What do we gain from God by observing the laws and walking in humble submission? Arrogant people are the blessed ones; evildoers prosper all the time, they flout God, and come to no harm."

Malachi 3:14-15

Malachi has many more messages about how the people are going rogue. There are hopeful moments and promises that if the people get their relationship with God and others in order, the future looks bright. The loving, judging, merciful God tells us that to receive mercy we must first own our sins and repent by changing our behavior.

The season of Advent is a time to look back and to look forward. We are generally good at looking back. There is no question about past events. We take comfort in remembering with joy the stories of Jesus' birth. The caution is not to get lost in the sweet and beautifully posed scene of baby, mother, and father, as if that is the complete story.

It is more challenging and perhaps troubling to pay attention to the equally important orientation to God's final judgment. As long as we have breath in us, we should be growing in spiritual discipline and faithful obedience. During Advent we celebrate what has been fulfilled, through the stories of Jesus' life. They anchor us. That heritage orients us to God's refining and purifying as we prepare for Christ's future coming.

Dear God, guide us to action according to your will. We long to grow in faith and service. Give us the courage to act. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Louise Stowe-Johns

December 11

Peace: The Fear of Home

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 3:1

Our family has numerous Christmas traditions, many which require extensive preparation. The decorating begins on Friday after Thanksgiving. (I’m one who doesn’t start any earlier.) There are several trees in various locations, nutcrackers on the hearth, stockings on the mantel, multiple nativities, angels, and many holiday quilts. Then comes the baking which includes assorted cookies, orange slice cake, cranberry bread, and cinnamon rolls. The once-a-year drinks are Russian tea and egg nog. Don’t forget shopping (thank goodness for Amazon), wrapping gifts, and planning events like an open house, holiday party, and/or Christmas dinner. As a mom and a control freak, I feel responsible for all of this and am frequently guilty of a bit of overkill.

For the twenty-five years of our marriage, Duane and I have celebrated Christmas in this way in our home in Warrenton Lakes—except for one year. In 2016, our family decided to go on a Christmas cruise. I was very excited with a bit of a Skipping Christmas (novel by John Grisham, 2010) mentality. We’d have a Caribbean Christmas with palm trees and beaches and enjoy cruise feasts and umbrella drinks in place of our traditional Christmas fare. There would be no family or church commitments, cooking, decorations, or shopping.

But as our sailing date grew closer, I felt panic setting in. How could we celebrate Christmas on a ship? Would the only trees be palm? Would they have a nativity? A Christmas service? We had agreed to no presents with the trip being our gifts to each other. The whole thing seemed so Grinchy. So I sprang to action. I made mini Christmas tree quilts for each stateroom which were decorated with some of our favorite things. I unpacked the stockings and bought stocking stuffers. I researched the on-board amenities for the Christmas cruise. As usual, Duane gave me a hug and told me all would be well.

And it was. Christmas came as it always does. We sang carols and worshipped with people of various beliefs from around the world. The food was different but delicious. The decorations were not ours but were beautiful. Our immediate family members were there, and as we stood on deck at midnight in the middle of a beautiful starlit sea to watch as Christmas came, I felt the joy from the gift of the Christ Child as I do in our home, at Bethel’s Christmas Eve service, or as I did as a child around our cedar tree.



There is a popular quotation from Dr. Seuss's story, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, that says, "It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes or bags! Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. 'Maybe Christmas,' he thought, 'doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.'"

It can come at home or far away because Christmas comes in our hearts. Let's make them ready!

Dear Father, I pray that you will guide us to prepare our hearts for Christ's coming as we prepare our homes for the holiday festivities. Keep our priorities straight with Jesus in the center and service to others a close second. Give us peace in knowing that Christmas will come, with or without our activities. Amen.

Rosanne Williamson



December 12

Joy: The Joy of Home

Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: Be glad. Always be gentle with others. The Lord will soon be here. Don't worry about anything but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.

Philippians 4:4-7

Do you count your blessings? I frequently and solemnly count mine, one by one, to be reminded of what God has done in my life. I have also learned that too often when I focus on my own problems, I lose sight of the good things in life, I get irritable and distracted; I lose perspective. When I do, it's time to look upon what I do have and the people I share my life with to get my positive outlook back. And one way I get help to ease my troubled mind is to go to the Word daily. I'll often find a scripture that hits really close to home, too close to home... when I had hoped to find a few holy words to justify my bad attitude. True, I have not wanted to be lifted up all the time; in the moment I'd have rather wallowed in my souring sorrows. Hmm... then I remember there's also a little something called prayer. And in this scripture Paul tells us to stop the worrying and take all our concerns and fears to God. I should pray and get it off my chest, giving it all up to the Lord, even if I don't really understand how it works. Then I feel the warmth in my heart, and everything is at peace even for just a moment and I know it's God's peace that takes me there.

It's easy to show consideration to other people when I'm in the right mood, but in these few lines of scripture from Philippians, Paul tells us to show this attitude to everyone all the time. Showing joy means being a person who is considerate, kind, and fair to everyone. I need to remember God loves me and helps me work on being that considerate person, both to myself and others.

So, no matter what type of day I'm having, I'll take a few moments and go to Him in prayer. I'll tell Him of my concerns and equally of my praises, for I know He is listening and wants to spend some quality time with me to help me find Joy, so I can readily share it with others. And with knowing my Lord will return any day, I choose to be joyful and ready! I choose to study the Word and pull myself up out of my self-pity. I choose to be heartened and know God is with me always! And one day Jesus, my beloved Savior, will come to take me home with him to the Father...

Dear Father, I celebrate in You every day. I also know You know my concerns, even before I know them. You make it clear when I choose to listen that you're on my side, working with me and not against me. I know the sooner I realize You are in control and let You do what You do best, the sooner I will be at home with peace in my mind and joy in my heart. So, I choose to continually praise and be joyful in You and with those around me every day. Amen.

Don Otey

December 13

Joy: The Joy of Home

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. Titus 2:11

This year I read a sign hanging in a home I visited. The sign read: *It's not the destination, but the journey.* I wonder, is this accurate? Is this true? Can the destinations and the journey both be equal? Wisdom or foolishness, these my thoughts I share.

God is our compass during the entire journey we have to travel. Beginning with our first breath to our last, with faith and hope I believe God will not abandon. God's love for us by sacrificing his son Jesus for all of our sins sealed us as children of His family. In our hearts and minds we seem to strive to understand God's will, blessings, and graces of love, peace, joy, healing, faith, justice, righteousness, and holiness.

Like climbing a mountain filled with obstacles, we make these steps along the way with many uncertainties. Alone we may not understand each footprint we make impacts many others. Together as a family we help each other stay focused on God's will and what pleases our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus.

God's love flows in us and through our whole being each moment of every day. To be a river in the flow of life, we climb on the mountains or cross the valleys with faith, hope, trust and love resting with us and guiding us today, tomorrow, and every special day God gives us.

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.* Psalm 96:11-13

Merry Christmas to all.

*Dear Father, may our lives bring glory to you, our rock
and our fortress. Please be with us on the journey.
Amen.*

A Bethel Brother in Christ



December 14

Joy: The Joy of Home

The Lord says, "I will give you your life as a prize of war in all the places to which you may go."
Jeremiah 45:5

Louise and I met at Drew University School of Theology in 1965. She was from Texas, and I was from Louisiana. We became a couple and were married in Texas at her father's church over the Christmas season the next year. We both graduated the spring of 1967 and prepared to move to Duke University, where I had been accepted into the doctoral program in religion.

I was working as an interim pastor at a church in Bound Brook, New Jersey. The people in the church were wonderful and worked hard to train me and teach me how to preach. I will never forget them. I told them I needed to resign to go on to the next phase of my career. Louise got a job in Durham teaching art, speech, and drama in a local high school.

The young people helped us pack and wrote messages and their names on the boxes. It was like a party! However, the death of a member of the congregation delayed our departure from New Jersey.

Finally on the road, Louise drove ahead in our little gray VW bug and I trailed in our rented U-Haul van. Our day went well until it was almost 9:00 p.m. We were on the interstate twenty-five miles north of Richmond. The highway was nearly empty. I felt the van swerve slightly, and then sweep back and forth across the highway. A blown rear tire caused the van to turn around completely in the road and then hit the guardrail on the opposite side of the road backwards. The van turned over gently the first time; the second and third violent revolutions left me dizzy and bewildered. When the van came to a stop at the bottom of a ravine, I instinctively took off the lap belt, opened the door and got out. As I was climbing out of the ravine within two minutes there was smoke, and a fire began in the motor beneath the cab.

As the sun went down, the fire burning our things got brighter and brighter. Cars on both sides of the divided interstate stopped and rescuers began to move down the sides of the ravine to save me. I ran down to warn them to stay away. The fire sizzled but never blew. I asked drivers of the first two cars that stopped to drive on and look for a grey VW and tell my wife that I was alright. After an hour the police came, and after another half hour, the fire truck. The firefighters brought books to me that had fallen out of the van. One of them brought me a large canvas with a painting by Louise depicting a fiery resurrection scene. I grabbed it and ran down through the

ravine and to the other side, holding it like a child with a new toy. I gave it to Louise with tremendous joy! John Wesley called himself "a brand plucked from the burning" because of a family fire when he was a child. Now I understood what he meant.

A passage in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Letters and Papers from Prison" ran through my mind over and over. The great pastor and theologian mentioned Jeremiah 45:5. I had received my life as the greatest gift.

A man had stopped and began loading our things that survived into his truck. He came over and told me that he was a Baptist minister and the owner of the truck stop down the road. He guided Louise and me to the motel by his station and put us up in a room. When I began to take a shower there was suddenly blood everywhere. The local EMT squad took me to a Richmond hospital where the cut in my scalp was stitched up. If the blow had knocked me out, I would not have survived.

When we arrived in Durham the next day, we moved into our apartment and sat down to relax. There was a knock at the door. It was a professor at the Duke Medical School, who was related to a family at the church in Bound Brook. He gave us an envelope. It contained a check for \$500 from the church. It was a fortune to us and enabled us to get a new start, because we literally had lost almost everything. I went to the dean of the Graduate School in Religion the next day. He was a rather dry and matter-of-fact New England Ethics Professor. He looked at me over his glasses and asked me how we were going to pay the school and get restarted in life. I told him the way we had always paid our way, by working: Louise teaching and me working as a pastor. He relaxed and told me that the school had a fund that would cover part of our expenses.

Our Christmas was sparse. We had lost most of our material possessions, and yet we had learned so much about giving and receiving. The young people at the church helped us pack. People at the wreck site were willing to risk their lives for me. The Baptist minister gave us a room for the night. The EMT crew gave me a ride to the hospital. The church sent us money to get restarted. The university paid off part of my debt. Most of all, I was given my life back and a new start in life. Our prayers were filled with gratitude. We had so much to be thankful for and a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christmas, God's greatest gift.

Dear God, help us keep the focus on the greatest gift of Christmas, your son, Jesus our Savior. May our hearts welcome him this Advent season. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Dick Johns

December 15

Joy: The Joy of Home

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
Matthew 7:7

Thirty-five plus years ago, Kirsten and I decided to pack up and move from our first home in swanky Georgetown South in Manassas. After searching around for some time, we liked what we saw in Warrenton. A fresh start was exciting and got us thinking about the possibility of a new home and a new area. Both of us enjoyed (and still do) getting our daily exercise; biking for me (both pedal and motor) and walking/running for Kirsten. Airlie Road with its one lane bridge and waterfall and pleasant Busthead Road (now tritely called Blantyre) was part of the area's appeal to us. The old stone church I would regularly pass also caught my eye.

A few years later when our son, Eric, was born, we wanted to have him baptized and thought we'd check into that stone church, Bethel UMC. As we were not church goers, we thought we would attend a few services and ask to have him baptized. Initially we thought we weren't ready to commit to a church, but the weekly invitations, hospitality, and overall positive welcome and vibe won us over and kept us coming back.

Eric's early enjoyment at Bethel amounted to checking out the hubcaps on the cars in the parking lot and receiving a candy after service from longtime member Mr. Wilkes. His interest grew once he was in view of Gretchen Davis at the piano and loved watching her play. A few short years later he would be the one at the piano; a pastime he still loves. Kirsten and I have become more and more involved in the church, enjoying Bible studies, UMW, choir, and other activities. Warrenton and Bethel have been a blessing . . . not just finding a home for us, but also for our souls.

Thank you Lord for showing us doors that not only bring peace and comfort, but to challenge us to be better individuals in service to those we know and those we do not. Amen.

Joe Florence



December 16

Joy: The Joy of Home

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

Early one morning I was driving toward Amissville to pick up a lady that needed transportation to her medical appointment. As I was nearing Warrenton, my phone rang. Besides getting 10+ sales/spam calls a day, I normally never answer my phone while driving. But I did answer it because I believe the Lord was telling me the call was important. I pulled over on the side of Route 29 and answered the ringing phone. It was a lady on the other end that was just released from the Fauquier Hospital emergency room. She had been taken there the previous evening in an ambulance after calling 911 for her medical emergency. Now she was stranded at the hospital with no way home. Her family was not in this area and none of her friends drove. To complicate the situation for her, and I was aware of this, taxis were not picking up people from the hospital yet due to the COVID pandemic.

I told her that I was currently en route to pick someone up and take them to their medical appointment, thus it would be about 1 hour before I could get her. She said that would be fine, that she would be waiting for me at the emergency entrance of the hospital. I did not previously know the lady, nor had I talked with her; however, she said that she had gotten my phone number from a friend of hers who I had previously given a ride to and as a last resort gave me a call.

About an hour later I arrived at the hospital and sure enough she was there waiting for a ride to her home. On the way, she said she was “starving” as she hadn’t had anything to eat since the previous day and asked if we could stop to get some breakfast food to take home, which we did.

She was overjoyed to get home, thankful that God had answered her prayer, and that all had worked out. It was a blessing to me to help get her home.

Father, I pray that you fill me with the joy of the Lord, that overwhelming joy. Your joy is unlike anything this world has to offer. It brings peace, trust, and hope and with that a rest because I know You are in control. Your Word says, don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength! I will lift my eyes to the hills, Lord, because I know from You comes my joy and peace. Thank You, Father, and I love You. Amen!

Gary Pinson

December 17

Joy: The Joy of Home

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."
Luke 2:10-11

Much of our Christmas music has been inspired by the Lord. "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is an example, and one of my favorites. The text was written by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), who was also a great preacher of the time near Boston & Philadelphia. His world-renowned Christmas carol began in 1865 with his trip to the Holy Land.

On Christmas Eve of that year, Brooks journeyed on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. He rode into the nearby fields, the traditional site of the shepherds who watched their flocks by night. That night he attended the service at the ancient Church of the Nativity, built in 326 over the very place where Jesus is believed to have been born. His memories of that night were so unforgettable that three years later he wrote this carol for his Sunday School children at his Philadelphia church.

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light:
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth!*



Once the text was written, Brooks asked his organist Lewis Redner to compose its music. As Saturday night came, Redner had nothing planned for the Sunday service. Redner later related how during the night he was awakened with an angelic melody in his ears. He immediately wrote it down, finishing the harmony the next morning. The composition was first sung by six teachers and thirty-six children. Today this beautiful carol is sung by millions all around the world.

What a joy it would have been if Phillips Brooks and Lewis Redner had lived to realize how universal their carol had become. Yes, let us all remember the joy experienced at the birth of Jesus, and the joy we all share when singing so many of our Christmas carols.

*Father, thank you for all the opportunities we have during the Advent/Christmas season in singing and listening to carols that share the message of the birth of your son. We especially thank you for the freedom to worship. Be with those who have had their freedom taken away, and those who may never experience the true joy of Christmas. We pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

Jane Brewer

December 18

Joy: The Joy of Home

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

Christmas has always been the time of year when I find the most joy. When I was growing up, all the other kids seemed to really thrive at summertime but not me. I loved the Christmas season. Around December 1st, I would almost always become flooded with the feeling that, no matter what was going on in life, everything would be okay because Christmas was almost here! After that, I could find joy everywhere - little joys like my favorite Christmas songs on the radio or a candy cane from the teacher, and big joys like getting to have some time off of school and getting to see family I didn't get to see often. It also felt like other people could feel it too - the anticipation of celebration, endings and beginnings, and a chance at a fresh start. Most people seemed a little more relaxed, a little happier to see one another, ready for some time off and the new year. Everyone seemed a little more willing to share joy with one another instead of keeping it for themselves.

As I have gotten older, that feeling of joy for the season has lessened but it hasn't disappeared. Despite all the ways the Christmas season can be painful, there is so much joy to be found in this season of renewal and relief. The year is almost over and a new one is about to begin. There is much to celebrate! And what a beautiful reason for celebration God gave us by sending us Jesus - a renewal, relief, and joy for the world.

I hope you all find renewal and relief this Christmas season, and can let go of any troubles you may have faced this year, if even for a moment. I pray you can share with family, friends, and strangers the joy that God has given us much to celebrate.

Almighty God, thank you for all the joys, big and small, to be found this Christmas. Please continue to be with us in this season of renewal and relief. Thank you for always being with us and for bringing us together at Bethel. Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Sarah Hundley

December 19

Love: The Blessings of Home

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Luke 1:39-45

As Christmas grows near, we often think of the gifts we have purchased that sit wrapped under the tree. Will Joey like his Star Wars figure? Will Virginia like her doll? Will Emma's sweater fit her? We spend far too much time being concerned about those gifts, because, as Christians, we know the true meaning of Christmas is that we received the GREATEST gift ever: Jesus Christ our Savior. God had so much love for us that He gave us His son. Wow! I love to read and reread the Christmas story from Luke. To think that Mary, a young teenager, was told she would be the mother of the savior of the world is hard to imagine in today's world. What amazes me most is how she accepted this news without an argument, with gracious obedience, and not only accepted it, but praised God for this and all his blessings!

In Luke 1:39 – 45 we read about when Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, who was also expecting. Elizabeth told Mary that her child leaped in her womb when Mary greeted her. Elizabeth then proclaimed to Mary, "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Mary indeed knew the Holy Spirit was within her. She felt gloriously blessed. Then, in Luke 46 – 55, Mary sings the "Magnificat" which has since been set to music to be a beautiful cantata, often performed during the Advent season. She sings praises to God! She could have chosen to be resentful, complaining, irritable, or a number of other negative emotions when the angel Gabriel told her what was about to happen in her life. After all, she was a virgin, soon to be married, and she was just a young teen. How was her fiancé going to take this bit of news? But instead, she overwhelmingly felt God's love, and readily accepted her lot. She was overcome with the Holy Spirit and praised God for choosing her!

How many of us would have accepted that situation as graciously and perfectly as Mary did? I, for one, did not. I, too, had a teenage pregnancy. My son Joey was born to me when I was 19. In addition to being a fairly new bride, which in itself was an adjustment, the feelings I had when I found out I was expecting were far from joy, far from the obedience Mary demonstrated. I was definitely NOT praising God. I was terrified - afraid of becoming a mother so young, knowing my life was going to change dramatically. I was resentful that I would not have the "college experience" that my

friends had. I would have to postpone getting my degree for a long time – maybe never receiving one at all. The future seemed bleak, and there was minimal support from my parents. The fear of being a bad mother and of being responsible for another human being was insurmountable at times. I can't help but contrast my reaction to Mary's. For me, it was all about **me**. For Mary, it was all about **God**.

As time went on, I slowly adjusted to the idea of having a baby, and by the time I gave birth, my husband and I were looking forward to seeing what "it" (no ultrasounds in those days) would be. Boy? Girl? Would the baby be healthy? Would he/she be smart? Would he look like me? On September 25, 1971, at Fairfax Hospital, I gave birth to my firstborn child – a son. That's when my heart changed from one of fear to one of love. It was no longer "all about me." I never before in my life had felt the overwhelming love that I did that day – this child was a gift from God! And I knew I would be OK. And I was. And I am.

Fifty years have passed since that day. Fifty years of wonderful memories; memories that evoke joy, pride, and tears, but mostly LOVE. Is this the kind of love God has for his children? His love is so great that we can't even begin to comprehend it. But I like to think that I've gotten a little taste of how God loves me, when I feel the immense love I have for my son (and daughter). I would do anything to keep my children safe, to protect them from physical harm, and to keep them from getting hurt by others. The love and protectiveness I feel for my children today have not diminished one iota since the day they were born.

Christmas is Love. God is Love. I don't claim to feel what God felt when His love was so powerful that He sent the Greatest Gift - Jesus - to us. I can't claim to feel the love Mary experienced when she was chosen to be the mother of our Savior. But I know love. God has taught me how to love. And at Christmas time, when my children, along with their children, come home to celebrate at our house, I am reminded of how much God loves me.

Father God, I praise you for the gift of my children. I pray they will follow after you and be a builder of your kingdom. I ask that you protect and steady their steps. And, Father, I especially thank you for the gift of your precious son Jesus. May we always remember that we can count on Him to guide and love us. Amen.

Gayle Ferrell



December 20

Love: The Blessing of Home

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.
Micah 5:2

Christmas was always a special time in my childhood home. We moved from Texas to Mississippi to Louisiana, back to Texas and then onto Oklahoma and then to Virginia, but through all the moves each house we lived in was home. None of them were grand affairs, but my mom made each one special, warm and full of love. I had friends who had more brothers and sisters, bigger houses, fancier cars, and name brand clothes. Many went on elaborate vacations, had super toys, and always enough money to buy ice cream at lunchtime at school. But in my mind they were all small things...they were cool, especially the lunchtime ice cream, but I knew something special was waiting for me at home... a warm hug and a snack made especially for me.

Before each Christmas my father would decorate outdoors with lights that would sparkle in the night, while my mom would decorate the living room and den...and then we would all join together in picking out a tree and putting our favorite ornaments on it...my dad loved tinsel and would always lather the tree up so that it seemed like it was in the middle of an ice storm. Oh how I miss those times where love was made manifest in our little home in the small things, the small things that really matter.

Jesus was born into an unimportant region of Israel in a small town on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and yet this little town is now one of the most important places on earth. I wish for you a special Christmas where what the world thinks is big and important is ignored and what seems unimportant to the rest of the world is at the center of your lives. May love warm your hearts and bring you the true joy of Christmas.

O Lord, thank you for the small things that really matter. Thank you for Jesus, for our families and for our own little church that shines so brightly in the darkness. Amen.

Rev. John Chadsey

Love



December 21

Love: The Blessing of Home

“Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’” They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.”
Isaiah 62:10-12

Several years ago our church performed a Living Nativity complete with a stable, a manger, and live animals. We did that for a couple of years until one season it struck a handful of the youth “actors” that the position of our crèche, the shell of our nativity scene, was blocked by too many trees and a brick wall to the street beyond. To them it was symbolic to how we sometimes cover up the nativity in our lives and block out Jesus with all the other busyness of the season. That very day they sought to return the real message to the forefront and we helped them tear down the whole setting and rebuild at the very apex of the outside wall of the main sanctuary, the very corner of the crossing of two main roads in the community...they “removed the stones” in front of our church. They removed the obstacles to that “highway” beyond and placed the Word as a “banner” right out in the open to share with other youth and families in the community.

Only it didn't end there. Some of the young people had relatives in a couple of nearby nursing homes and they knew their grandparents, great uncles and aunts could not travel to see the beautiful story they portrayed so passionately. So, as innovative young people, they found another way to go out through the church doors into the community. The inspired young people devised a way to take the crèche ‘mobile’ and share the message of Christmas to many more. They raised the “banner” for youth and adult alike, raised with God's grace in Christ's holy name. Their purpose allowed them to call more people “Friend” or “Fellow Christian”...they came to know other youth that had before felt deserted or alone. We all soon had new friends; we all felt a part of the “Sought After” and our community of fellowship became “The City No Longer Deserted.”

Dear Father, the real message of Christmas is in Him who came to us as a baby. His reward was indeed with Him and His work was still before Him. Now we see that work was completed at the cross and through an emptied grave. There our Joy and our Salvation were accomplished. The true message is for us to know the full abundance of the gift we have until our Lord returns to bring all things to a glorious culmination. Until then, as our youth were inspired by your Word, please work through the rest of us to identify others who will be joyfully redeemed of the Lord. Amen.

Don Otey

December 22

Love: the Blessing of Home

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[f] because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Matthew 1:18-24

Today is the 22nd of December. It is not "Three days before Christmas" nor 'Christmas Eve's Eve's Eve'. In the Steinmeyer household, December 22nd is Alice's birthday. We take this time in the Advent season to celebrate Alice and the anniversary of her birth. The time reminds us that not only is the Christmas season a time of blessings and reflection, but it is also Jesus' birthday. One of the Sunday School events I remember is having a birthday party for Jesus. Over the more than seven years that I have loved Alice, I have attempted to arrange a memorable event around her birthday--separate from Christmas. We have had special dinners, traveled, and attended theaters, but the most memorable event was in 2015.

After many weeks of planning, I organized a series of events in and around the Charlottesville area for her birthday. We started with a visit with some friends for some fireside libations. Then, through a series of riddles, we enjoyed some modern Christmas activities as well as time to reflect on the season and our future. Alice and I went to an orchard for cider and gingerbread house making fun. We attended two local theater productions: A Muppet Christmas Carol and The Nutcracker. For dinner, a quaint restaurant served us small plate tapas. Late in the evening we strolled through the downtown Christmas market. Right on cue, Alice received a text from her mother, "I bet all the riddles were fun, but now one more thing must be done..." Once she shared her mother's cryptic message, I asked if she would share the adventure of life with me. She agreed, and I knew I would forever have a home with her.

Though perhaps without Muppets and gingerbread houses, Joseph pledged himself to Mary. He promised to care for her throughout her life. When times got tough with devastating news, shocked friends and family, an angel's appearance, and a long, difficult journey, he kept his promise. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph cared for him as his own son. Fulfilling commitments to family and God make a home. The home Alice and I have together, with our sons Scotty and JJ, is the most precious part of my life. Every holiday season and throughout the year, I thank God for the blessings of my home.

Dear Father, may we make our homes centered around you, May we love our family as you love all your children through the easy times as well as the difficulties. In Jesus name. Amen.

Greg Steinmeyer

December 23

Love: The Blessing of Home

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior".

Luke 1:46

Where is home? I've heard it said that "home is where the heart is." Home for me for the first eighteen years of my life was Brown City, Michigan. I was born in a warm and comfortable farmhouse into a warm and loving family who welcomed me as the first little girl to be born into a family already having three boys. That could be what set the stage for me to feel especially loved. Loved by a father, a mother, and three big brothers.

Home through the years has been many different places since leaving that nuclear family in 1956 to join the adult world on my own. Home currently is Warrenton, Virginia in a modest house shared with my husband, David, our collie dog, Ginger Grace, and our tuxedo cat, Tux.

Home in those fifty some years between 1956 and 2006 has been in Virginia, Vermont, and New York states. What has made all those different places home? In every case the key ingredient has been "love." Love surrounds me in the form of family, piano students and their families, church families, and neighbors.

What is love to me? Love is children crammed into my home at Christmas for a "piano party," where the focus supposedly is to play Christmas songs for one another, but to the quiet observer, it is children feeling happy and safe and proud to share with their peers what they have learned under my tutelage. It is also seeing the same children take turns and sharing the Christmas cookies, punch, and "pigs in a blanket" on the table before them.

Love is the Hymndingers crowded around my dining room table sharing a meal and the love and fellowship that has been nurtured through years of rehearsals and providing music for worship together.

Love is the choir, crammed into my home to share a meal and play a game of Pictionary together, again, coming together because of the love and kinship they feel for each other and the acts of loving service they give to their church.

Jesus said "Love one another." Coming "home" for Christmas is to love one another wherever we may be. I think Jesus would be pleased to know that wherever our hearts are, that is home. Celebrating Jesus' birth with love for one another can be the best reason for a party and a warm heart as well as a feeling of being "home for Christmas" wherever we are.

Dear God, thank you for the blessings of coming home at Christmas. May we spread that Christmas love throughout this season and into the New Year. Amen.

Joice Freidenburgh



December 24 -- Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve: Welcome Home

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2: 8-20

Beginning on December 23, 1998, a blizzard full of ice and plenty of snow swept through central and southeastern Virginia, ending its wintry rampage in North Carolina on Christmas Day. From the windows of our parsonage in Lynchburg, Virginia, the world was white. So white, in fact, that the giant evergreen in the front yard could barely be seen. My father had traveled to Connecticut the day the storm began for his cousin's funeral and had planned on returning by Christmas Eve morning in order to preach two services that night. However, with the weather and the way the world looked outside, that seemed impossible. How was he possibly going to safely travel through all that ice and snow?

The morning of Christmas Eve, I remember eating breakfast with my mother and brother, talking about Christmas, and wondering if Dad was going to make it back in time for services when we got a phone call from my dad. He was calling to update us on his journey. After talking to my mom, she handed my brother the phone and Dad told him to look out the front window. My brother went to look and then we heard him yell, "Dad's home! Dad's home!" My mom and I ran to the front door, totally shocked to see my father, surrounded by a whirlwind of snow, peering through the window with a huge grin on his face.

I imagine that the shepherds in the Christmas story felt what we felt that Christmas Eve morning – joy and relief. As the psalm says, joy comes with the morning. I hope you all find joy and relief this Christmas from whatever it is you may be waiting and praying on. Merry Christmas!

Lord, we thank you for helping us weather the storms in our lives, past and present. We are especially grateful for the joy and relief that come in the morning, and that you sent your son to save us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Sarah Hundley





O Holy Night

December 25

Christmas Day: Welcome Home

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Luke 2:8-20a



Merry Christmas

My memories may have been skewed by my young age, but I remember as a young child that the real celebrations of Christmas began on Christmas Eve. It was on Christmas Eve that we attended Mass where we sang carols, received communion, lit candles, and in a way that I could not fully comprehend at the time, were invited to come to the manger, peer into the eyes of the newborn babe and feel the welcome of God's love. It was on Christmas Eve that gift giving among family and friends began. And it was on Christmas Eve that the fullness of the hope, peace, joy, and love was ushered in by the light of Christ and our celebrations of Christmas began.

Things are different now. We, as a society, pay less attention to the rhythms of the church calendar and more attention to the secular calendar that tells us Christmas Eve and morning are the end of Christmas, not the beginning. Stores' Christmas items are on clearance a week before Christmas is here so there is room for Valentine's Day merchandise. Christmas carols stop playing on the radio the day after Christmas, and trees are taken down and put out on the street for pickup within a day or two.

I can't imagine that it would have been that way for the shepherds who came to the manger on that first Christmas night. They heard the angels' good news of the birth of a savior, and they heard the heavenly forces praising God: "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors," and they went to Bethlehem to see for themselves this miracle proclaimed to them. In that manger they found the promised Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Light of the World, their true home.

They told others because they couldn't contain their joy, and everyone who heard was amazed. Then they returned to their earthly homes glorifying and praising God. They had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah, their true home to come. I'm confident that the first Christmas celebration continued for them for a long season of praise and celebration. When we find Christ born in us anew on the climax of our Advent preparations – Christmas Eve – we too find a welcome to our true home and our celebrations should begin. Preparations are done. It's Christmas Day. Christ is born. Welcome home! Let the celebration continue!

Promised Christ-child, fill us with your light. Let our praise rise within us throughout the Christmas season – the season in which we celebrate your coming into our world and into our lives. And let us, like the shepherds, go without haste and share without fear. Amen and amen!

Pastor Faith Weedling

December 26

Lost at Home

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Psalm 90:1

“Where is your home?” is something we ask other people when we meet them. This helps us get to know each other. We build memories in our homes every day. We have just celebrated Christmas and the birth of Jesus and have shared this celebration with family and friends in our homes. As we celebrate we are happy and joyous that we have been blessed by God with the birth of his son. When we think of our home, we usually think of where we live. It is usually a safe place for us and our family. “Home” can mean other things as well. God wants Jesus to help us build a home in our heart. God also wants Jesus to lead us to come together at “home” (church) as a community of believers to worship. The Bible tells us that God is our “home” and our refuge. Home is the place where there is always unconditional love, everlasting peace, joy, and security. Jesus can be our home, but we have to let Jesus into our heart.

Over the generations, people have endured struggles in the world around them. This continues to be true of our world today. There are many distractions and struggles that interrupt us every day—news, television, cellphones, computers (email and media on computers), politics, conflicts between people, health issues, and over the last year and a half—COVID 19 virus. All these things have changed our world and how we interact in it. We probably experience feelings that make us feel lost. When we feel lost, we have an array of different emotions than we would normally feel (such as separation, sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, etc.). Please try to remember that no matter how chaotic or scary our world may make us feel—God and Jesus are there for us. I recently read that we can never see God as our “home” until we have Jesus Christ in our heart. As we move from the celebration season back into our regular world, this would be a good time to ask ourselves if we have Jesus in our hearts. It is a time to consider how we can connect with Jesus and how to invite him into our hearts.

Our world keeps us so busy we often don’t think we have time or don’t make the time to go to God’s “home” (church). I can think of several reasons why we should go to church.

- Church can connect us with God. It is a reverent place that allows us to get closer to God. It is a place of peace, calmness, and quiet. It allows us to disconnect from our busy world.
- Church gives us time to reflect on gratitude. Reflecting can help us realize how blessed we are and how much we have in our homes.
- Church can connect us socially. It gives us the opportunity to meet and have fellowship with other believers that can help us grow in our faith journey. We can encourage and support each other through difficult times.
- Church can bring a family together. Today it seems family members are going in different directions—working, going to different sports practices, going to music

lessons or dance lessons, etc. This would be an opportunity for the family to be together.

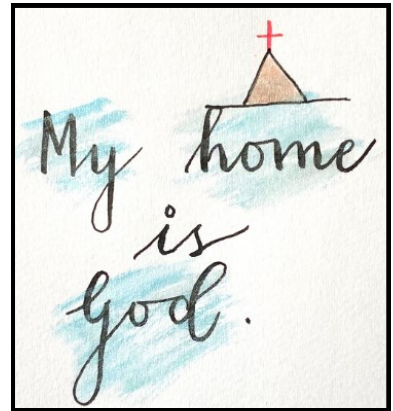
- Bethel Church gives us the opportunity to come together so that we can live our faith and share God's love. It provides opportunities to connect with and support our local communities and other communities that are further away.

We know from the Bible that Jesus was sent to save the lost and bring them home. Even though this was a long time ago, nothing has changed—he is still finding us and saving us when we are lost. It is comforting to know that when we feel lost or are struggling, Jesus is there for us. Before COVID my husband was not able to come to Bethel to worship with me. My daughter, Mary Beth, was not able to join me either because of her severe health issues. With Bethel offering the worship service online, now my family is worshipping together on Sunday mornings. They have also joined me in the Bible Studies on Zoom. I feel Jesus has answered prayers for me and we have found his "home" together.

I save poems that I have read that have made an impact on me. One of my favorites is "My Home is God."

And now "My Home is God," and shelter there,
God meets the trials of my earthly life,
God compasses me round from storm and strife,
He takes the burden of my daily care.
O Wondrous Place! O Home divinely fair!
And I, God's little one, safe hidden there.
Lord, as I dwell in Thee and Thou in me,
So make dead to everything but Thee;
That as I rest within my Home most fair
My soul may evermore and only see
My God in everything and everywhere.

(Author Unknown)



While preparing this story I was reminded of the lyrics to "Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling." This hymn tells us to "Come home, come home. Ye who are weary come home." This "home" refers to Jesus' home. When we are lost, perhaps this will remind us to come "home."

Always remember God is always faithful, even in our darkest hours when we are lost. If we are faithful to him, this will help us when we feel lost. He will guide us back to our homes and our world.

Lord, thank you for giving us a "home" to share with you when we face difficult times. We know that we are safe in your "home." You are our strength and are always there with us. Thank you for being there with us as we get through our daily activities. In a world of many distractions, you are our peaceful and reassuring place. We are blessed to have you as our protector. Amen.

Sandra Colvin

December 27

Lost at Home

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:15-17

The cover for this year's Advent Devotional book is from an old photo from Bethel's rich history. This family of three sisters and a brother are ancestors of Lewis Lee; generations of his family have worshiped at Bethel for going on two centuries. I'm sure they were farmers who traveled over long bumpy roads to come to worship. I imagine they loved seeing the strong stone walls and marveling over the bright windows. Each service was a reunion with friends and family. I can almost hear the singing of old hymns we still cherish today.

Established in 1834, the land on which Bethel is built was given by James Blackwell. Tradition holds that in giving the land, Mr. Blackwell said that the new church must be free--all must be welcome and so it has been. Our church has seen civil and world wars, cultural conflicts, and changing times.

But the most important part of Bethel's long history is the people. People have been members of this body of Christ for going on two centuries. There have been hard times as well as times of growing. Members have volunteered and served as their conscience guided them. We have worked together for peace and justice. We've provided our local and global community with bowls of soup and firewood as well as medical kits and computers.

Generations have found a home at Bethel, a refuge from being lost in the world. During this Advent season, consider where your true home is. And come home.

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the generations
of saints who came before us.
Call us home this Christmas
season to live our faith and
share God's love. Amen.*

Rosanne Williamson

Oh Come All Ye
FAITHFUL

December 28

Lost at Home

*In the beginning the Word already existed.
The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He existed in the beginning with God.
God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.
The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
John 1:1-9

When the pandemic times began, I thought I would never get used to being at home and doing work there all day, every day. By now, I am so used to it, that it is harder to get in the habit of going to the office again, since everything I need is in my home now – a computer, printer, scanner, a comfortable chair, my comfy dog at my feet, my family! With all the benefits of home, why would I ever leave? Going back to the office has reminded me though, that I miss interactions outside of my home. The feeling of home comes with me, AND I get to be with some of the smartest people I know, the team I work with at the District Office. I also get to once again start visiting churches and pastors and laity all around our area again – something I truly enjoy, as you all love your churches as extensions of your home as well!

The trick for me in this season is to recognize the feeling of home comes with me, AND that I get to share that joy for home and that joy for outside of home wherever I go. It was always with me and always will be. That feeling can be distilled into the feeling of love! The love we get to experience most tangibly in the spaces we have made for ourselves and the people we share it with. The love we share for God as we go deeper into knowing and loving God in community that we choose – in our churches, in our workplaces, in our local Starbucks and grocery stores – we carry this with us wherever we go.

This passage from John is poetry that reminds me that not only is this love suffused in our places. It is across all of time and space – we serve a truly Cosmic Christ that transcends all of time and space, and yet was intimate enough with us to become incarnate in our actual time and space for 33 years or so. Home will be wherever we bring the love we learned by being Beloved of Christ.

Dear Jesus, be our home wherever time and space take us. As it has been, so shall it be.
Amen.

Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert, District Superintendent

December 29

Lost at Home

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the spiritual blessings that Christ has brought us from heaven! Before the world was created, God had Christ choose us to live with him and to be his holy and innocent and loving people. God was kind and decided that Christ would choose us to be God's own adopted children. God was very kind to us because of the Son he dearly loves, and so we should praise God. Christ sacrificed his life's blood to set us free, which means that our sins are now forgiven. Christ did this because God was so kind to us. God has great wisdom and understanding, and by what Christ has done, God has shown us his own mysterious ways. Then when the time is right, God will do all that he has planned, and Christ will bring together everything in heaven and on earth.

God always does what he plans, and that's why he appointed Christ to choose us. He did this so that we Jews would bring honor to him and be the first ones to have hope because of him. Christ also brought you the truth, which is the good news about how you can be saved. You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised Holy Spirit to show that you belong to God. The Spirit also makes us sure that we will be given what God has stored up for his people. Then we will be set free, and God will be honored and praised. Ephesians 1:3-14

We read the Bible. We pray prayers of worship, praise, and thanksgiving. We do these in all different ways, just as we as people are all different. There are many ways to read the Bible: by a concordance, on a schedule, by chance opening to a random page, reading cover to cover again and again over the years, or as you are doing here now, through a daily devotional! All these are OK and serve the One we so adore and honor. Whether it is "automatic" or "routine" for any of us to read and pray, or even not, it is all good. All the ways take patience and take time, so... "God will be honored and praised"... through your everyday life of devotion.

That devotion needs to be a nurturing one, a true relationship with Him as salvation comes from Him who first loved us. I have learned in my over half-century of years that love must be returned with faith and trust in my heart. And so it is with the pure relationship between God's heart and mine. Every human relationship I have, whether in my marriage, with family, with friends, within our church family...all need to be nurtured, rekindled, encouraged, and enhanced just as much as I must also nurture my relationship with God and the Son.



I must pray. I must read His Word. I must put my faith in Jesus to bring together everything in heaven and on earth. We must let God Almighty and his Son, Our Savior, Jesus Christ, fill our collective lives.

Dear Father, as we come out of the recent Christmas season, let us continue to know it is necessary to nurture all our relationships, those most precious and loved, and those most in need of our care and support throughout this year to come. And still most important of all, let me be in a pure loving relationship with You, my Father God, through Jesus Christ your Son, by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Don Otey

December 30

Lost at Home

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, Have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He is calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Mark 10:46-52

A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said: "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words. Soon the hat began to fill up.

A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"

The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way. I wrote: "Today is a beautiful day; but I cannot see it."

Both signs told people that the boy was blind. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign reminded people how fortunate they were to have their sight. Should we be surprised that the second sign was more effective?

On October 24 this year, I was the lector at church during Pastor Faith's sermon series, *The Upside-Down Kingdom: Where the Blind Can See*. In reading the scripture, one thing stood out to me: Bartimaeus threw his cloak aside. Why was that stated? I did a little research, and one meaning was: Hooded cloaks function symbolically as masks. Someone in a hooded cloak doesn't need to be wearing a magic invisibility cloak – they become invisible because others aren't noticing them.

Was Bartimaeus wearing his cloak because he was blind? He didn't want anyone to notice him? Was it his security blanket? Do WE wear cloaks because WE are blind? If I can't "see" it, it's not my problem? Maybe we are blind... not just in sight, but in other ways. Are we blind to the needs of our church? Our community? The poor? Those in need? Do we need to take our own cloaks off so we can "see"? Through the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we can all "see". In John 9:25 it states "...I was blind, but now I see."

Jesus talks a lot about eyesight. He heals people born blind and critiques religious leaders for their lack of vision. Those who reject his gift end up blind.

Are WE blind? Let's take off our cloaks and be open to what God has in store for us. Jesus is in my heart and my life, which means he has found my lost home there also.

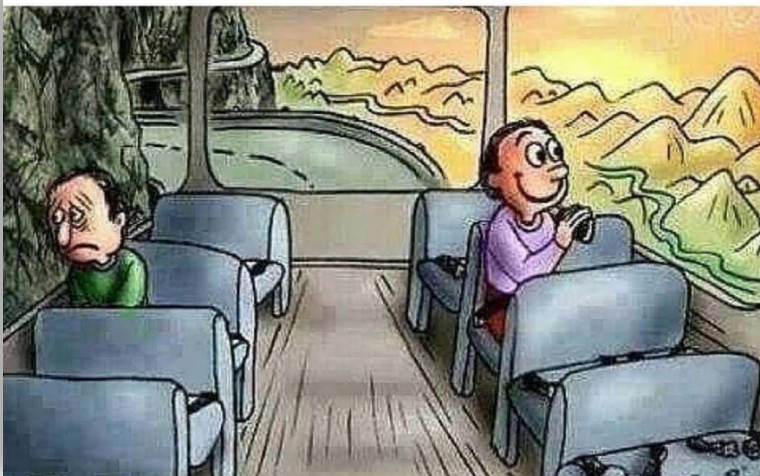
Be thankful for what you have and what you can "see" and share with others. Be creative. Be innovative. Think differently and positively. When life gives you 100 reasons to cry, show life that you have 1000 reasons to smile. Face your past without regret. Handle your present with confidence. Prepare for the future without fear. Keep the faith and drop the fear.

It's a beautiful thing to "see" a person smiling. But even more beautiful is knowing that you are the reason for the smile. Our faith is not about everything turning out OK; Our faith is about being OK no matter how things turn out. You may touch someone's heart today and forever.

Dear Heavenly Father: I ask that you take the cloaks off of our lives and give us 20/20 vision through Your eyes. Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. We pray this through your son, Jesus. Amen.

Geneice Kemper

So much of our happiness
depends on how we choose
to look at the world.



December 31

New Year's Eve: Lost at Home

And Mary said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; And holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath held his servant of Israel in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever."

Luke 1: 46- 55

On a day like today, New Year's Eve, it is easy to think about all of the exciting things that the New Year may bring, especially if 2021 has been a difficult year. It is easy to want to look ahead, instead of backwards, to see what positive things the future may hold. Even if it has been a wonderful year, it is still easy to want to look ahead to what other great things the next year might hold. However, what if we took a second to look back on the wonderful blessings of the past year that God has given us just to remind ourselves that in times of good and bad, he is there for us and blesses us with many things that we may not see right away. It is only looking back on the year as an entire year that we may see the many blessings he bestowed upon us instead of looking at the year event by event and missing the many blessings he gave us because we were so focused on one thing.

One blessing that is easy to see today since it is so close to us now is how God gave us Jesus. We just celebrated his birth on Christmas and this was quite a blessing for us to receive and one that I am glad we celebrate every year. To think of this sacrifice is amazing and it reminds us how much God loves us. He gave his son to us for our salvation. This act alone seems like enough blessing for one year, but God has given me many others. What blessings has he given to you this past year?

Another blessing I can think of is my family. God blessed me with a great family that loves and supports me through good and bad, just like God does. They are a family of faith; at the center of everything is the love of God. This is not necessarily in big gestures, but small ones throughout the day and year. Daily things, like saying grace and praying, show my family's faith. Weekly or monthly things like Bible Studies, Motel Ministries, Sunday school, etc., show my family's faith. My brother and I were brought up with these things. As I continue to see my family do these things, it reminds me as an adult to do the same; so that God may know that I want him in my daily life and I want to show him that I am appreciative of his blessings.



May you shine the light of Christ in the New Year!

This year, my health has not been the best, but I am constantly reminded through blessings God gives me that he is with me every step of the way, even on the bad days. My mother is always with me and continually helps me. She is a gift from God and I thank him for her all of the time. So is my father. Each of them helps me in any way that they can and I know that without God, I would not have them or their love and support. Things could be much worse. Yes, I may have health problems, but I am alive and my health problems are minor compared to what some people may deal with on a daily basis. God reminds me how I am blessed by showing me the wonders of life all the time. It is just amazing what you can see in the world around you when you take the time to look.

So during this time of year, when it is so easy to look forward and want to forget the past year, let us look back and remind ourselves of the many blessings that God has given us and continues to give us daily. Let's remember to thank him, even for the little blessings that we may look over and easily forget about the biggest blessing he has given us, his son, Jesus. Through our prayers he knows we are appreciative of him and love him just as he loves us. Let's "Come Home" and feel very blessed.

Dear Lord, thank you for the many blessings that you have bestowed upon us this past year and continue to bestow upon us. Please help us to see our blessings more clearly in the upcoming year and help remind us that Jesus and you are there for us in times of good and bad. Thank you for all that you do. Amen.

Mary Beth Colvin

January 1

New Year's Day: Lost At Home

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

2 Corinthians 5:6-9

As I read this passage from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, a light appeared in my mind about the meaning of being "Lost at Home". As Paul says, if we remain at home in our earthly bodies, we are lost, away from the Lord. But by our faith we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

On this day last January 2020, my daughter Becky had been lost at home in her body with agonizing suffering for over a year and half. But like Paul states, she made it her goal to please Him with the way she lived her life. And I can attest to you, along with so many others who knew her, that her faith and service to the Lord was exemplary. Just a few minutes before the end of that first day of the New Year 2021, she was no longer lost at home and left her earthly body behind to be found with her new restored body with Christ in the new home he promised.

Now a year later, on this first day of the New Year 2022, I am still lost at home in my earthly body. My faith has been tested but still remains true to the Lord. I know that someday I will be found by Him, and no longer be "Lost at Home".



Lord, help me with my goal to please you and follow the narrow path that you lead us on. Let the Holy Spirit continue to live within my heart and soul. I know at times I am a sinner even though I try not to be. Forgive me and all sinners. Help me spread your word and light wherever I can. Lead me out of my lost feeling at home, for I would prefer to be with you. Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer. Amen.

2022

happy
NEW
Year!

January 2

The Light of Home

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

John 1:1-9

Another Advent-time memory from my time stationed at Kunsan Air Base, in South Korea...and this scripture made me think of a very poignant time when Jesus, as our light of God, led me to bring a message to others.

I've almost always been very comfortable standing up in front of people, whether while in school giving presentations or in doing military and business talks. I've even enjoyed teaching, whether to a room full of young Cub Scouts, my Airmen, or even intense sessions in front of a bunch of business suit-types. But one of my fondest memories is standing before a group of people during Advent time in Korea, on a Laity Sunday in our Kunsan Chapel. It was the 3rd of December 2000, the first Sunday of Advent, and the theme of the service was titled "A Service of Word and Table". Much of my message centered on what I knew best about the Word, which most recently had been leading and mentoring young people in our church back home in Hampton, Virginia, where my wife and boys remained while I was stationed overseas.

I know to this day I had been divinely led to relate my experiences with those teens, to the adults there, also away from family and home. I spoke about how much tougher—a bunch—it was to please and keep attentive dozens of Junior or Senior High youth. In my tenure as a youth counselor I saw it all, the good and the not so good in not only group behavior, but in their young lives. Always, at some point, I saw the faith and belief in all of them and expressed by all of them in even the smallest ways. I grew to be more comfortable with those younger ones than any of the others I've faced standing in the front of a room, trying my darned best to lead them to Jesus, knowing He was leading me to do so.

Knowing a little of God's word, making it my own, and sharing it with others, had hopefully given the teens back home and the adults there at Advent in the Kunsan Chapel something to think about in those moments in which I was privileged enough to be able to stand in front of them all. But I knew then and know now, it wasn't me...

As John was a witness to the light, Jesus is THE Light...I'm not even the slightest of sparkles in one of those modern miniature LED Christmas light bulbs many of us string around our trees each December. I know who the light is in my life, it's my one and only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am just one among many, many fellow Christians that know that, too.

In December of 2000, Advent on Kunsan was still a season of giving (even away from home)...and yes, for receiving...receiving the blessing of being able to share my message, from the Word, as given to me from the light of God, my Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear Father, will I continue to let you and your Son work through me until the day I leave this earth? I certainly hope so. You have given me these experiences, working with young people and those not so young, all wonderful people that have made such a difference in my life. I can only be content that I have given back to them an ounce of what I have received in return. Lead me, Jesus, to where I need to go next. Amen and Amen.

Don Otey



**TRADITIONAL COMMUNION
SERVICE**

KUNSAN AB, ROK

0815

Laity Sunday

3 Dec 2000

**1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
A SERVICE OF WORD AND TABLE**

January 3

The Light of Home

But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.
Jeremiah 17:7

As I prepared to head off to Kenya in November, I was feeling very anxious. We have COVID and the world seems to be in such turmoil. We had a mission team being held hostage in Haiti. We had a car bombing in Uganda. Why the heck would I get on an airplane and head over to the slums in Kenya? Well this passage came to me: *I have shown you, son of man, the thing that is useful that you may seek LORD JEHOVAH for yourself, that you will do justice and you shall love grace and you shall be prepared to go after your God* (Micah 6:8).

Hmmm, so I am supposed to trust in the Lord, to make the Lord my hope and confidence. What next, am I supposed to walk on water? Max Lucado's book came to mind, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*. I've always thought this was a good book to get you moving. I have changed the title to: "If You Want to See God You Have to Get Out of the Church Pews."

Many years ago I went with my friend, Walter Hughes, to Ghana. It was the year we had Snowmageddon in the DC area. I was supposed to meet up with Walter in New York City to fly out to Ghana, but the snow kept him from coming up from Smith Mountain Lake. Walter called me and said for me to stay over until he could arrive. My spirit felt like I was supposed to go ahead. Crazy, right? So we prayed, and I got on the plane.

When I arrived, no one was there to meet me. One of the security guards offered me his phone. I called the minister who was supposed to pick me up. He sounded shocked. The guard asked for a gratuity, and all I had was a \$20 bill. My spirit said just give him the \$20. God was with me because for the next four hours, I had no one panhandle or get near me. I had all the soda or water I wanted. I also had a shady spot and a stool to sit on. After a few hours Pastor Yah showed up. We started the long road trip to his church. The seat in the car was not all the way bolted in and moved. Time for the seatbelt and prayer. As we were heading to Aman, the pastor's phone rang. It was the Head of Education demanding to know why we have not started on the school project yet. Pastor Yah tried to reason with him and told him the investors in the school were delayed because of the snow in the US. I never realized that these mission schools see us as investors in their children and school!



A few days later I was asked to go to the drug store to replenish the clinic with medical supplies. The clinic was so bare they didn't even have aspirin. Once at the drugstore, the assistant minister was chatting with the lady behind the counter. She asked, "Who is the *Obroni*?" She didn't know I was learning the language. *Obroni* is the Ashanti word for a white person. I asked the minister did she say what I think she said. He laughed and said, "Yep!" She was horrified, but I just smiled and told her that I have been blessed with gifts for the clinic and need to be a good steward of the gifts. She got the order together and I noticed the bill was pretty low. She gave me everything at cost. She assured me that the bill was correct and also let us buy more medical supplies. I was feeling pretty good about my efforts. Then Mama Dora got a hold of me.

She said, "Ken, why did you buy so much medical supplies when the children have very little to eat?" I told her that is what Walter (my friend who had finally arrived) told me to do. She said that Walter had promised he was going to buy food. So I called Walter who was in the bush preaching and distributing food at the witches' camps and the Muslim tribes north of us. He couldn't believe how much money I had left and said, "Yes please go buy whatever Mama Dora wants and needs." She told me to buy Uncle Sam rice. I thought she meant Uncle Ben.

In this new year, please get out there and do something beautiful for God. This COVID virus has driven us away from helping others. I hope I have some great stories to bring back from Kenya. We have two schools we are setting up with computers and the "Internet in a Box." Who would have thought this ministry would be as big as it is? I hope we are able to share the love of God and the stories of Jesus with people who have never heard.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you will lead us all to do something beautiful for you. I pray for us all to gain hope and confidence this Christmas season. We know what you have accomplished with our little church. Help us as we seek you, Lord Jehovah. Help us to be bold, but humble, as we do your will. Give us the hope and confidence to do greater things. Teach us to trust in you and not be anxious. In Jesus name. Amen.

Ken Trexler

January 4

The Light of Home



In the beginning there was the Word....In the Word was life, and that life was humanity's light—a Light that shines in the darkness, a light that the darkness has never overtaken.
John 1:1a, 4-5

With whom do you share the light and love of God?

Thirty years ago I invited people active in Kairos prison ministry to a meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. We were gathering to consider a new ministry for incarcerated youth, using the model of three-day spiritual retreats, such as Walk to Emmaus. The liturgical season was Epiphany.

That morning one of the attendees had read a daily devotional. She asked me, "What about Epiphany?" I was ready to go into a discursive theological response on its meaning when she stopped me. "How about naming the program for juveniles, 'Epiphany'?" And so the youth ministry was born.

I am certain of the inspiration in that name, because the story has within it elements of unexpected blessings, changing expectations, taking risks, and God's guidance by a star.

In the Epiphany program teen girls and boys are called Stars. For many of them, being a star is a ridiculous idea. However, without minimizing their crimes, they need to see themselves in an illuminating light. The weekend can start a journey that will change them.

The wise stargazers who sought Jesus were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod—a dangerous route—but to go home a new way. During the weekend the incarcerated youth sit at round tables with volunteers from outside the facility. They form new families, "table families," helping them experience what it means to be part of the household of God. The Stars may be seated beside a person with whom they have a grudge—or worse. As

unconditional love is experienced, they begin seeing each other in Christ's light.

It is the hope and prayer that the Stars will forge a new path in their lives, for returning as they came may be dangerous. The light is guiding them to a changed sense of belonging, of "home" in God.

One of the greatest challenges during Covid-19 has been the disconnect from loved ones. We haven't been able to Pass the Peace to others in our church community. This has helped us recognize the privilege of sharing with families, both biological and spiritual. May those bonds be nurtured, and may our families expand to include all God's children, especially those who have not been so blessed.

Dear Jesus, guide us to see the Stars in our community and reach out to give them a home-- a place to feel love. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Louise Stowe-Johns



January 5

Enjoying the Company

*In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God and the Word was God.
The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word nothing came into being.
What came into being through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.*

John 1:1-5

*Arise! Shine! Your light has come;
the Lord's glory has shone upon you.
Though darkness covers the earth and gloom the nations,
the Lord will shine upon you; God's glory will appear over you.
Countless camels will cover your land,
young camels from Midian and Ephah.
They will all come from Sheba, carrying gold and incense,
proclaiming the Lord's praises.*

Isaiah 60:1-2

As most of you know, I am not a morning person. You are far more likely to see emails from me at midnight than at 6:00 a.m. But when I do get up before dawn, I love to watch the sky change as the sun rises. I've seen beautiful sunrises at the beach or in the mountains or even while flying overseas. They have been breathtaking. These days, however, I am finding joy and beauty in the sun rising over the far end of my neighbor's yard. As I write on an early morning in November, the light begins to break through the branches of the trees and then seems to rest for a short time on the top of the trees. My front lawn gets brighter as the sun's rays reach out to touch the green grass and the leaves that are scattered across my lawn, and I give thanks for the light.

Epiphany is on January 6, the end of the twelve days of Christmas and the beginning of the season of Epiphany that lasts until we begin the season of Lent. It's the celebration of the visit of the Magi or Wise Men to the baby Jesus as found in Matthew 2:1-12. It is a story rich in images of Magi traveling from afar on camels, treasured gifts honoring the Christ child, a mother taking all of this in, a jealous king plotting to get rid of the newborn King, and a star shining bright guiding these Gentiles to Jesus.

An epiphany can also be a sudden or striking revelation. Maybe that's how I need to see each sunrise I witness or the light of each day, whether I take it in at dawn or a bit later in the morning, a striking revelation of the light of God in the world, in our church, and in my life.

*I want to see the brightness of God.
I want to look at Jesus.
Clear Sun or Righteousness, shine on my path,
And show me the way to the Father.
In him there is not darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart Lord Jesus.*

Lord Jesus, may we all recognize, appreciate, and give thanks for the daily, never-ending light that has been given in you. Shine in all our hearts so brightly that we cannot help but to live in your light and let our lights shine. Amen.

Pastor Faith Weedling





**May God bless our church and your family
as we are living our faith, and
sharing God's love in 2022.**

Happy New Year !

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